

HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES RAILROADS

It has been made very plain to us that the purpose of this occasion is to commemorate the completion of the Union Passenger Depot. It may be useful and interesting to review the history of railroads in so far as the same pertains to the city of Los Angeles.

I arrived here on the 15th day of November, 1869. We came from mid-south-Illinois to Omaha and thence over the Union Pacific to Ogden and from Ogden on the Central Pacific Railroad to San Francisco. From San Francisco we came down by steamer, the Orizaba, an old-fashioned side-wheeler. It took forty-eight hours to come from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Arriving off San Pedro, barges towed by a tender brought passengers and their luggage to Wilmington. At Wilmington we boarded a railroad train and were brought to Los Angeles.

I have not told this in order to center any personal attention on myself, but the enumeration gives you the extent of the development of the Pacific Coast railroads.

It will be noted that the Golden spike connecting the Central Pacific with the Union Pacific was driven on May 10, 1869, about six months before we came. It will also be noted that inasmuch as we had to come down by steamer from San Francisco there was no railroad connecting San Francisco and Los Angeles upon that date. Furthermore, it will be noted that the only railroad existing here

was a short road called the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad, running from Los Angeles to Wilmington. This road had been completed in October 1869, about a month before we came, and it was the only railroad in Southern California at that date. It was built by a gentleman named H. B. Tichenor and his associates. Mr. Tichenor was engaged in the lumber business and my conclusion has always been that it was built for the purpose of avoiding the expense and delay of handling freight, and particularly lumber, from San Pedro to Los Angeles. Before this railroad was constructed all freight lumber was hauled up by horsepower from San Pedro.

The situation was, therefore, that San Francisco was the terminal point of a transcontinental road, that no rail communication between San Francisco and Los Angeles existed, and that the only railroad we had was a twenty-four mile road to Wilmington.

In 1870 this city contained a population of 5400 people, according to the census records. It can be safely said that of this number at least 4000 were the old pioneer Mexican residents of the city, leaving about 1400 to be accounted for by Americans, chiefly, some Italians, Germans and French. It was most emphatically nothing but a small Mexican pueblo comparable in this day, I would say, to Ensenada.

The preponderance of Mexican population gave the town its character. It was but a small village and all transactions were upon a small scale. It drowsed along from day to day, from month to month and year to year without improvement, with comparatively

few sales of real property and those that were made involved but a small amount of money. There existed a few village stores, and the town had the *manaña* characteristics of the Mexican people.

The *carreta*, a cart drawn by oxen with the yoke on the horns and not around the neck as was the custom, was the chief means of transportation of goods. Even then, the Mexican *vaquero*, careening at full speed down Main Street, would slow down when he reached the Plaza Church, would reverently remove his hat as he passed by and when he had reached its boundary would put his hat on again and go galloping on his way.

The supremacy of San Francisco, both in population and wealth, was complete. The rush to California, predicated upon the discovery of gold, went directly to the mines in Northern California, which were immediately attribute to San Francisco. Whether they came by the covered wagon or by steamer, they left Los Angeles out of their itinerary; ~~and~~ while such cities as San Jose, Stockton and Sacramento were growing by reason of their proximity to San Francisco as well as their being in the line of mining development, and each of them was larger than Los Angeles. Los Angeles was given the designation of the cow county, as cattle raising was the chief occupation of the *rancheros*.

The builders of the Central Pacific Railroad began as early as 1867 to develop a plan for the construction of another trans-continental road which might be called the southern route. They

formed the Southern Pacific Company, which is in existence today. Their plan was to start from San Francisco, go down to about where Gilroy now is located, and run the road in a southeasterly direction through Fresno and San Bernardino Counties to Arizona and thence through Arizona and New Mexico to El Paso, Texas, where connections would be made with railroad systems centering in that place. Los Angeles was to be sidetracked and left out in the cold. After the belated news of this reached Los Angeles the Americans here, true to the instincts of their race, formed a committee of prominent citizens to negotiate with the Southern Pacific officials, seeking to have them change their route and come to Los Angeles and thence going on east. Of course, the original Big Four of the Central Pacific, namely, Hopkins, Crocker, Stanford and Huntington, were in the sole control and ownership of the new Southern Pacific Company. The committee received a cold reception. It was suggested that perhaps a spur might be built for a branch line to run down to Los Angeles. They did prevail upon the Southern Pacific people to come down and meet the people of Los Angeles to discuss the matter further. Mr. Crocker came down to represent the Company. A fixed hour of appointment was made for him to meet and discuss the matter with the Council. The place where the official business of the city was transacted - which might be called the City Hall - was located on Spring Street between Court and Temple Streets, on the east side of the street. This was a long, low one-story flat-roofed adobe building, roof covered with brea. Mr. Crocker

was on time for the appointment, but the members of the Council were huddled in a little side room and kept him waiting. He waited about an hour, and still no invitation to appear before the members of the Council was made, and he was becoming madder and madder. Finally he got up and left, informing those within hearing distance that he would see that the grass grew in the streets of Los Angeles yet. He returned to San Francisco and the Council committee, much abashed, had to go to San Francisco in order to conciliate him and induce the Company to build to Los Angeles. After long consultations, the Southern Pacific made an offer. I am not positive that I am accurate about this, but it was substantially this: that ^{if} the County of Los Angeles would pay \$450,000.00 in cash and purchase and convey to them as part of the consideration the little railroad from Los Angeles to Wilmington which I have mentioned, they would come directly to Los Angeles. That offer was accepted by the Council, but they had to return to Los Angeles to submit the matter to the voters, for the only way they could raise the money was by a bond issue. A resolution was passed setting a date for an election upon the proposition of whether or not such bonds should be issued to make this purchase.

As was inevitable, as every city has learned by experience, the proposition met with serious opposition. There were two factions, one for the railroad and the other against the railroad.

Both were noisy, each confident that they would succeed. As the day approached for the election the excitement had worked up to fever heat. There were two newspapers in the city at that time, one argued voting for the bonds and the other argued against, and these newspapers were full of editorials which were very intemperate and largely personal.

It was customary in those days, and regarded as perfectly ethical, to bargain for the vote of the Mexican population. This population had its leaders; one man would represent he controlled 250 votes and could deliver them, or any such number, and it was the custom to make the bargain - so much a vote - \$1.00, \$2.00 or \$2.50, depending upon the interest of the contending parties. These Mexican voters would be gathered together and put in a corral and kept there over night and the next morning hurried en masse to the polls. There was no Australian ballot in those days. In fact, the character of the vote was determined by the color of the ballot. For instance, for the railroad might be pink in color and the opposing votes might be yellow. The parties buying the votes would have a checker at the ballot box to see that all the pinks he had bargained for were deposited in the ballot box so that there should be no overpayment of money. This custom was carried out upon the occasion of this election. There was one deviation. I have forgotten which side perpetrated the strategy, but let us say it was the side for the railroad. During the night, when the voters had assembled and were in their respective corrals, the pro-railroad people bought the whole

batch of the anti-railroad voters, and the first thing in the morning they were pushed into the line of voters and cast their ballots. They did this by paying a higher sum than the other party had offered. When this became known there was tense feeling generated by the people who were opposed to the railroad. During the day both factions met at one of the polling places where Mr. I. W. Hellman, who was the president of the Farmers & Merchants Bank and probably the wealthiest man in the city, and who was strongly for the railroad, encountered a group headed by Doctor Griffin, another very prominent gentleman, who was strongly opposed to the railroad. Doctor Griffin was a Virginian who had left Los Angeles to serve in the Confederate Army during the Civil War and had returned to Los Angeles. Each of the gentlemen had some of his followers with him and a very wordy altercation took place between Mr. Hellman and Doctor Griffin during which, in a fit of extreme anger, Doctor Griffin struck Mr. Hellman on the head with his cane, inflicting quite a long gash which bled profusely. Mr. Hellman's friends took him and put him in a hack and drove to his residence, which was on the corner of Fourth and Main Streets where the Farmers & Merchants National Bank now stands. When he got home his wife, naturally, was very much alarmed and insisted that a doctor be called. She asked Mr. Hellman which doctor she should send for. Mr. Hellman hesitated a moment, then said "Send for Old Doctor Griffin", and Doctor Griffin came and treated the wound which he himself had caused.

Those in favor of the bond issue carried the election by a substantial majority. The result was that the contract between the citizens committee and the Southern Pacific officials was carried out. They immediately began the construction of their railroad south to Los Angeles and that road between the two cities was completed in the following year, 1876. In itself it did not accomplish very much for the benefit of Los Angeles, but as a part of the system that was to extend to El Paso it had a far reaching influence. The Southern Pacific continued its construction from Los Angeles eastward over the identical road it now occupies, passing through San Gabriel, El Monte, Spadra (near Pomona) on to Colton and thence eastward to El Paso. It was completed in 1881.

So, Los Angeles for the first time found itself upon a trans-continental road, and while San Francisco was nominally the terminus, nevertheless, in fact Los Angeles became the terminus, because ninety per cent of the passengers over the road came to Los Angeles and remained here.

The completion of the road in 1881 marked the end of the period when Los Angeles was a Mexican pueblo and became a thriving American city. The effect of the completion of the road was immediate. The population began to increase, demand for homes was strong, subdivision of ranch property rapidly proceeded. And this condition grew with increased vigor during the years 1882, 1883 and 1884. It continued through 1885 and 1886 with increased intensity and it needed only the completion of the Santa Fe System to Los Angeles in 1887 to inaugurate the greatest boom in real property Los Angeles ever had, and probably it has been unequalled in the history of American city development.

There were three classes of people who came:

First, the laborers. It was easy to conclude that because of the increase in population and the demand for homes, with all the component circumstances, that there would be great demand for labor. They found steady and remunerative employment.

Second, there were the people who, by reason of the notoriety gained by this city during this era of intensive speculation, flocked here for the purpose of making some easy money. It was not so much their intention to remain, but rather to make their pile and then return to their homes back east.

Third, there was an influx of professional racketeers and speculation boomers skilled in the art of deception.

In 1888 this boom flattened out. The professional boomers left overnight. Those of the class who had come to make large

financial gains who could return home did so, but many were so completely broken financially by reason of the collapse of the boom that they had to remain.

While a certain degree of depression occurred immediately after the collapse of the boom, nevertheless, this city has always shown such resiliency in such a situation that it was not long before business began to pick up again. The competition for passenger service between the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe System during the years 1887 and 1888 was such that it was, I think, the Santa Fe who fixed a fare of \$1.00 from Chicago to Los Angeles. It was no unusual thing for more than a thousand passengers to arrive here in one day.

Some time along about 1900 local capitalists formed the idea of constructing a line from Pasadena to Los Angeles and in some way this was extended to Terminal Island in San Pedro Bay. It barely maintained its system, but Senator W. A. Clark, of Montana, was induced to take up the proposition of its extension to Salt Lake City. He furnished the means and the road was built and completed to Salt Lake City, and soon thereafter it was acquired by the Union Pacific in 1905.

So it was that in 1881 Los Angeles became the terminal point for one transcontinental road - the Southern Pacific - and in 1887 it became the terminal point for a second transcontinental road - the Santa Fe System - and in 1905 it became the terminal point for a third road - the Union Pacific. The effect of the increase of population brought in by these three railroads to the city of Los Angeles is the best evidenced by the census returns.

Beginning in 189___ a controversy arose respecting the necessity of constructing a union depot and where the depot, if constructed, should be placed. This controversy continued for the period of _____ years. On _____, 193___ the controversy was finally settled adversely to the railroads' contention; this site was selected. The decision being final, the railroads immediately went to work, and this building is the result.

Having thus traced the development of the different railroads to the point of the completion of the Union Pacific System, it is time to ask: What has been the result of the completion of these railroad systems?

(1) In 1876, when the Southern Pacific completed its road from Los Angeles to San Francisco, Los Angeles was the Mexican pueblo I have referred to, with a population not over 5700, and today this city has a population estimated at _____. Or, to be fairer, in 1881 when the Southern Pacific Railroad made Los Angeles a terminal station on a transcontinental route, its population even then did not exceed 11,000 inhabitants.

(2) Another thing the railroads have done has been that Los Angeles has wrested the crown of supremacy from San Francisco in many lines, such as population, shipping, and others. Concisely stated -

In 1870 Los Angeles has a population		
of	5500	Tonnage at harbor
San Francisco	_____	
In 1900 Los Angeles	_____	
San Francisco	_____	

In 1930 Los Angeles had _____

San Francisco _____

The 1940 census will show a greater difference.

(3) From this increase in population comes leadership in homes, and in industry and the thousand things that come from the incident of a great population.

Be sure to remember that the railroads are the primal cause of all this development. Of course, we have our port, with its commerce, our hydroelectric system, our Owens River and Metropolitan Water Systems - the movie industry and others; but there would be none of these here, because without population there would be no need of any of them. So the railroads which do bring the people are, after all, the basic source of our improvements.

Is it not, in social matters, if any one pays you a compliment, does you a favor, makes you a present, or unsolicited helps you, that instinctively you feel that it is a matter of duty and obligation on your part to thank him and attest your gratitude. Surely, this is so. Now Los Angeles is a distinct, political entity, and it is a distinctly social entity; it has characteristics peculiar to itself and different from other cities, and therefore Los Angeles, as a city, has a duty and obligation to discharge, and that is to show the companies in some manner their appreciation, in some manner give them their thanks, for the immense service they have rendered this city.

The matter of the location of this building was not in their hands. It was fixed by the Railroad Commission of the State of California, your representatives. In effect you made them put it here. While the state Commission, I suppose, had some powers over grade crossings and engineering items, yet I am advised the character of the building itself was wholly in the hands of the railroad companies. If I am not mistaken they could have put up a row of posts with a roof to keep out the rain and it would have been a compliance with their obligation. It would not have been strange that after having been buffeted about and driven from pillar to post for twelve years, they might have been justified in constructing a plain, unattractive building and letting it go at that. But they did not do that, even if they had no choice of site. They sunk out of sight all feeling that they had been (as they thought) unjustly treated. Notwithstanding their being barred from selecting a site, they acted in the broadest minded way, and with great magnanimity constructed this building. Does not such fine, high-grade conduct call for some manner of recognition on your part, some giving of thanks and praise? I think it does, and so do you.

The railroads have done a deal of construction, but this building is the cap-sheaf of all their construction work. It is a jewel, but for the love of God, what a setting! Its beauty is marred, diminished and lost by virtue of its surroundings. Every passenger who walks out of the portals of this depot is faced with

the front yard of this city.. As it is now, and will remain if not changed, this front yard consists of a jumble of old decayed buildings, surrounded with filth, debris and decay - in effect a part of the slums of this city. First impressions are often the strongest, and as it is the first impression is met with astonishment, that a city advertised as the home of palms, flowers, and outdoor beauty is an advertising delusion. If you permit these surroundings to remain, you might as well greet the new-comer with a sign painted in large letters with the wording "The citizens of Los Angeles are third-raters", for that is just what the scene spells.

The purpose of this address is to arouse in you the determination of carrying this plan to a finish. That you, by meetings, by resolutions, by personal contact, persistently maintained, persuade the city officials to action. Not by way of pressure. I am certain that your city officials realize the propriety and necessity for this work of cleaning up the front yard, as well as you do, and will favor it. Not by pressure, therefore, but indicating your as taxpayers favor it and offer to them your hearty cooperation. By so doing, you will be showing to the railroad companies your gratitude for the construction of this beautiful building.